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ABSTRACT

One problem that surfaced with the speech communication basic course (COM 105) at Valdosta State University (Georgia) was that the actual content covered by individual instructors varied widely, so widely that two given sections taught by different instructors may bear little resemblance to one another. This problem was addressed first through a revised course syllabus that sought to assure that all students would be exposed to the same types of materials while still giving instructors some flexibility. A second means of addressing the problem was to develop a student manual to accompany the COM 105 textbook, Adler and Rodman's "Understanding Human Communication." This 160-page student manual, essentially a study guide, was developed by two faculty members who had independently developed a number of student guides for their courses. The development of the study guides was predicated on the idea that the students did not understand the concept of reading the text material for retention. Merely providing instructional objectives does not improve test scores; students must be shown how to study. Those interested in using a similar study guide should consider the following recommendations: (1) make sure study guide items are used on tests and are applicable to the course and chapter objectives; and (2) stipulate in writing with the publisher who is responsible for which publishing tasks, i.e., who will proofread, paginate, etc. (Contains eight references, a basic course syllabus, and excerpts from the study guide.) (TB)

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ED 384 917

Using Study Guides to Help Students Focus Their Reading in the Basic Course

David A. Blakeman and Raymond W. Young

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The basic course in the Speech Communication curriculum at Valdosta State University, "COM 105," is a survey type or "hybrid" course that seeks to serve as an introduction to the broader subject area as well as a beginning public presentation course. At VSU COM 105 is offered four times a year: summer, fall, winter and spring quarters with as many as 15 sections running in a given quarter. At one time or another during the course of the academic year, virtually every one of the Communication Arts faculty members—which include theatre, broadcasting, dance and public relations specialists as well as communication professors—teaches at least one section of COM 105. In addition, there are usually at least two adjunct faculty handling night sections.

The course is an Area IV elective in the campus-wide lower division core curriculum and is a requirement for students emphasizing speech, broadcasting. theatre, dance, organizational communication and public relations. In the past COM 105 was also required of certain business majors, education majors and nursing majors, although currently it is just a popular elective for students in those majors.

Apparently there is no limit to the number of sections of COM 105 that could be filled at VSU in a given quarter. The class size is limited to 28 students per section, up from 24 previously. It is rare that there is a section with fewer than 24 students in it, no matter the time of day or night COM 105 is offered. As might be expected, the night sections tend to enroll more nontraditional students than do the day sections.

Valdosta State University is a regional university with enrollment of about 9,000 students that serves a 40-plus county area of south and southwest Georgia, an area that is largely rural in setting with low population density. It has traditionally been a chronically economically depressed area with higher than average unemployment, lower than average per capita income, lower than average educational attainment and higher than average sub-standard elementary and secondary schools. The area's college-going rate is substantially lower than the state as a whole. VSU has traditionally enrolled freshman with SAT scores in the

500 to 800 range; the 1993 average for the institution as a whole was 831, up slightly from 827 the previous year and 823 in 1991 (*VSU 1994 FactBook*), and admits large numbers of developmental studies students (8.1 percent of the fall 1993 enrollment (*Fact Sheet*) who must take remedial work and regular freshmen who must work off high school curriculum deficiencies (typically foreign language and sciences) before beginning their collegiate credit studies. A sizable number of students at VSU, especially among the minority students, but by no means limited to minority students, are first generation college students. (This is a consensus statement, not a statistic published by the university.) A primary task of the university faculty is to take these students where they are and move them upward toward the baccalaureate degree. The attrition, as you would expect, is high. In the most recent period for which statistics are available, 1992/93, the retention rate of developmental studies students was 57.8 percent and for all first year, first-time-entering students, 66.3 percent. Over a four-year span, the retention rate for all in the cohort is 37 percent, as opposed to 48.7 percent for the Georgia university system as a whole. (*Fact Book*)

This background is provided to help you understand the nature of the clientele and the nature of the instructor's task in the introductory speech communication course at VSU, where many of the students will be freshmen or developmental studies students trying to cope not only with the demands of their course work but also with the whole concept of what being a college students is all about. Bringing these students through this course without "dumbing down" so much as to make it a sub-collegiate experience is a daunting one, made no easier by the wide variety of background and preparation the faculty assigned to COM 105 bring to the classroom.

One problem that surfaced with the course over the years was that the actual content covered by individual instructors varied widely, so widely that two given sections taught by different instructors might bear little resemblance to one another, a situation at least partially corrected by a revised course syllabus (*exhibit* A) that sought to give instructors some flexibility in the way they approached the course, while ensuring that all students were exposed to certain kinds of required activities and assignments.

A second approach to standardizing the course content was the development of a student manual to accompany the COM 105 textbook, Adler and Rodman's *Understanding Human Communication*. This project was undertaken by two

faculty members who had independently developed a number of student guides for their courses, including COM 105. The revised syllabus for COM 105 now includes the student manual as a required text. The cost to the student is $10, double the original estimated price from the printer; *sic semper bookstores*.

The manual is 160-plus pages long in an eight-and-a-half-by-eleven page format. While it is somewhat more expensive than originally anticipated, the price is not outrageous and after using it only two quarters, student complaints about having to buy it have largely died out. It seems to help to point out to students that any royalties earned on the sale of the manual are dedicated to the VSU Foundation for student scholarships. (Previous to the publication of the manual, much of this material was being duplicated out of the departmental budget and distributed free to students.)

The development of the study guides was predicated on the idea that the students did not understand the concept of reading the text material for retention. Researchers have found that study guides improve college students' reading comprehension (Bean & Ericson, 1989; Maxworthy, 1993) and test scores (Jenkins and Neisworth, 1973; Semb, Hopkins, and Hursh, 1973). Jenkins and Deno (1971) found, however, that merely providing students with instructional objectives does not increase their test scores. Jenkins and Neisworth (1976) argue that this failure was caused by the lack of correspondence between instructional objectives and test items. Clearly a stronger verb than "read" is needed, and "study" is relatively meaningless to people who have never developed very strong study habits. A study guide, keyed to the concepts covered in the text, was thought to provide an aid to retention of the material by forcing the students to rehearse the material as they seek to provide the proper answers to the student guide items. Several researchers (Miles, Kibler, and Pettigrew, 1967; Semb, Hopkins, and Hursh, 1973; Jenkins and Neisworth, 1973) have found that students learn and gain significantly higher test scores if students practice using the study guides *and* they know that study guide items will be on the test.

A typical chapter study guide for COM 105 (*exhibit* B) includes 20 to 30 items that require students to look up and write definitions, explain concepts, work out models and the like. To achieve application and synthesis of the text materials a section of activities, some original, many borrowed or adapted, is provided in the manual. A separate set of objectives for the study guides has not been developed, at least not yet, in the belief that the objectives included by the text's authors will also

work for the study guides, but there is some thought that those objectives need to be repeated in the manual to reinforce them. Perhaps the text's objectives will be included in the next edition of our study manual.

In order to give the students practice, they are directed to read the chapter in the text, to fill out the study guide, and then check their answers against those supplied by their instructor (exhibit C).

To correct any incorrect answers, students are directed to re-consult the text. Each instructor is supplied with a set of study guide answers for their ease of use in this process.

Problems

The same company that publishes the Adler and Rodman text published the VSU COM 105 student manual through its custom publishing division. This arrangement has not proved entirely satisfactory: Little or no proof reading was done, one of the author's names was omitted from the cover, no pagination was done, no table of contents was prepared, all of which detract from the utility of the manual. The authors will not leave these details to the publisher in the second edition of the manual, assuming there is one, which at this point looks probable. Other details to be added in the second edition would be perforation of the pages for easy removal and drilling the publication for three-ring binder, both of which would make the manual a good deal easier and more convenient to use, especially by those instructors who use the study guides as homework assignments to be handed in and graded. The initial press run was 1,200 copies, which should be fairly well depleted by the end of this academic year.

While not all the faculty members teaching COM 105 have been wildly enthusiastic about using the study guide, they have generally been tolerant and some (besides the authors) have welcomed it and use it extensively. There seems to be some evidence, although anecdotal in nature, that grades have improved in sections in which the manual has been made an integral part of students' preparation of the text material. At the end of the current academic year, a systematic review of the manual's effectiveness will be made, and if the outlook is promising, a revised edition prepared.

Recommendations

Based on our experiences in this first year of using the student manual, departments and faculty wishing to use the second edition of our manual or to develop one of their own will find that for a more standardized course the application of study guides may be easier. If their course is not standardized, it is important to "sell" both the faculty and students on the benefits of using study guides through a rationale that includes the findings that the use of study guides helps students to learn, helps students to achieve positive results in the form of higher test scores, and the use of study guides helps to standardize the course itself. In all cases, it is best to include *graded* assignments that require students to answer and to apply study guide questions.

Those who are contemplating developing study guides and a student manual for basic courses using others texts and for other introductory communication courses should make sure that study guide items are used on tests and are applicable to course and chapter objectives, which may have to be developed as well. Here, too, assignments should be given to students that require them to answer the study guide items and to apply study guide questions.

Finally, anyone contemplating printing a student manual through a custom publishing service should stipulate in writing the specific services expected of the publisher, and the right of the authors to proofread any material added to or supplemental to the manuscript submitted, specifically including the cover, the table of contents, and index, if any. Do not hesitate to add these requirements to the standardized contract form used by the custom publisher before signing such a contract. Even better, perhaps, would be supplying the cover, table of contents and complete pagination as part of the manuscript if those services are readily available locally either through computer software applications or from the campus editorial or publication service. Assurances by telephone that such services will be provided (along with active marketing of the manual to other institutions), if not actually in the contract, may not be forthcoming.

Those wishing further information on the VSU COM 105 student manual or advice on undertaking development of study guides may contact the authors at the Department of Communication Arts, Valdosta State University, Valdosta, GA 31698.

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Syllabus
COM 105
Speech Communication

Catalog Description:

Broad approach to oral communication skills including intrapersonal, interpersonal (dyadic), small group communication and public speaking.

Format:

Five lecture periods per week, limited enrollment per section, carries five hours credit.

Rationale:

An Area I requirement for Communication Arts students and an Area IV elective for other undergraduates.

Texts:

Understanding Human Communication, 5th edition, 1994, by Ronald B. Adler and George Rodman.

Study Guide & Activities Manual for Understanding Human Communication, 1994, by David A. Blakeman and Raymond W. Young.

Course Objectives: Upon successful completion of this course, a student will be able to:

1. Identify basic elements of the communication process: sender, receiver, channel, message, feedback, and context.
2. Identify the functions of language.
3. Identify concepts of language and meaning: semantics, abstraction, concreteness, ambiguity, vagueness, denotation, connotation.
4. Identify the types and functions of nonverbal communication.
5. Identify concepts of intrapersonal communication: self concept, attitudes, beliefs, needs.
6. Identify concepts of interpersonal communication: self disclosure, relational communication, power, trust and relational development.
7. Demonstrate skills of intrapersonal and interpersonal communication, small group discussion, interviewing and public speaking.
8. Distinguish between informative and persuasive speaking.

9. Present a well-prepared, organized, supported, and delivered extemporaneous speech.

Evaluation:

1. Three performance assignments including:
   One extemporaneous informative speech not less than five minutes in length.
   One small group activity.
   One activity selected by the professor from among the following:
   Persuasive speech
   Nonverbal performance
   Interview activity.

2. One research or analysis paper, three to five pages in length (typewritten, double spaced.)

3. Chapter and lecture examinations.

4. Final examination.

5. Effective participation in class discussion and projects.

6. Regular attendance in keeping with university, departmental and the professor's policy.

Revised Fall 1994

COM 105
Study Guide–Chapter 2

Directions: Read chapter 2: "Perception and the Self" in *Understanding Human Communication*, by Adler and Rodman. After you have read the chapter completely, go back through the chapter and look for the answers to the questions in the Study Guide. The items are generally sequential. When you have completed all the items in the Study Guide, compare your answers with those on reserve in the Fine Arts Materials Center. If you miss more than 10 percent of the answers, review the chapter and correct your answers.

1. What are the two most important underlying principles of perception and self?
   a.

   b.

2. What is self-concept?

3. Why is self-concept important?

4. How does self-concept develop from its most rudimentary stages?

5. What does "reflected appraisal" mean?

6. How can nonverbal behavior affect a child's self-concept development before language is learned?

7. How do verbal messages affect self-concept development?

8. How does expectation affect performance and self-esteem?

9. What are the three steps by which meaning is attached to experiences?
   a.

   b.

   c.

10. Explain selection as a function of perception.

11. How do selection factors affect perception?

12. What part does organization play in perception?

13. What part does interpretation play in the process of perception?

14. What factors impact interpretation?

15. How do **past experiences** shape interpretation?

    Assumptions about human behavior?

    Expectations?

    Knowledge?

    Moods?

16. What are the five most common perceptual errors?

    1.

    2.

    3.

    4.

    5.

17. What is empathy?

18. Who are the people hardest to empathize with?

19. What three attributes are necessary to develop empathy?

    a.

    b.

    c.

20. What is meant (in terms of empathy) by **open-mindedness?**

    Imagination?

    Commitment?

21. What part do simplicity and consistency play in self-concept?

22. What are the two ways people achieve consistency in self-perception?

    a.

    b.

23. What effect does self-concept have on perceptions of others?

24. What are the three parts of perception checking?

    a.

    b.

    c.

25. Why is perception checking important?

26. What is a self-fulfilling prophecy?

27. What are the two types of self-fulfilling prophecies?

28. How great is the influence of self-fulfilling prophecies in our lives?

29. How can self-concept be changed?

29. How can self-concept be changed?

a.

b.

c.

d.

30. What do sociologists mean by the term "*significant others*?"

COM 105
Chp. 8 Study Guide Answers

1. A small collection of people who interact with each other, usually face to face, over time in order to reach goals.

2. Interaction

3. Verbal and nonverbal

4. Long enough to begin to take on standards of acceptable behavior and feelings about each other that affect relationships and the group's goals.

5. At least three and up to a range of seven to 20.

6. Individual and group

7. Task-related and social

8. Individual goals have to do with the motives of individual members of the group;
   Group goals involve the outcome the group seeks to accomplish.

9. An individual's goal that is kept secret from other members of the group and is often at odds with the goals of the group

10. Learning groups, Growth groups, Problem-Solving groups, Social groups

11. Rules and norms, roles, decision-making methods, and patterns of interaction

12. **Explicit norms:** officially stated rules of behavior in the group
    Implicit norms: unwritten rules the group has about behavior in the group
    Social norms: rules that govern the relationship of members to each other
    Procedural norms: rules about how the group should operate
    Task norms: rules about how the job itself should be handled

13. **Functional roles:** roles that must be filled if task-related groups are to get a job done.
    Task roles: roles that help the group accomplish its goals
    Maintenance roles: roles that help the group keep the relationships among the members running smoothly; also called social roles.
    Dysfunctional roles: roles that interfere with the groups' working effectively

14. Initiator/contributor
    Information seeker
    Information giver
    Opinion seeker
    Opinion giver
    Elaborator/clarifier
    Coordinator
    Diagnostician

Orienter/summarizer
Energizer
Procedure developer
Secretary
Evaluator/critic

15. Supporter/encourager
Harmonizer
Tension reliever
Conciliator
Gatekeeper
Feeling expresser
Follower

16. Blocker
Aggressor
Deserter
Dominator
Recognition seeker
Playboy/girl

17. From the personalities or characteristics that the individual members bring to the group and from the idiosyncrasies of the group as a whole (the group dynamic.)

18. When one or more functional roles are not filled and when maintenance functions are not filled.

19. Members seated in a circle are more likely to talk with persons across from them than on either side. Members seated at the ends of a rectangular table are expected to talk more and are perceived to have more influence. At tables, as distance between people increases, the less friendly, less talkative and less acquainted with each other they are likely to be perceived.

20. A consistent pattern of interaction among members that a group develops.

21. **Authority rule without discussion**–use by autocratic leaders often
Expert opinion–person with special knowledge is given authority to decide
Authority rule after discussion–single decision maker takes into consideration thoughts of others in the group before deciding
Majority control–vote of the members is taken to reach decisions
Minority control–a few members make the decisions
Consensus–all members must agree before a decision is taken